



Youth Protection Guidelines

As an Explorer leader, you need to have basic knowledge about abuse of adolescents and the Youth Protection policies of Learning for Life. Due to the coeducational membership of Exploring, youth protection takes on added dimensions.

It is important to realize that, although child abuse is preconceived as a problem related to younger children, it is not unusual for adolescents to be victims of abuse—especially emotional, physical, and sexual. Therefore, Explorer leaders are obliged to be familiar with the Youth Protection emphasis of Learning for Life.

Guiding the Youth Protection emphasis is the five-point strategy adopted by Learning for Life to prevent abuse. This strategy includes the following points:

1. Educating volunteers, parents, and Explorers themselves to aid in the detection and prevention of abuse
2. Establishing leader-selection procedures to prevent offenders from entering the Learning for Life leadership ranks
3. Establishing policies that create barriers to abuse within the program
4. Encouraging Explorers to report improper behavior in order to identify offenders quickly
5. Swift removal and reporting of alleged offenders

It is important for you to remember that **anytime abuse is suspected in the Explorer program, Learning for Life and the participating organization head or designee must be contacted immediately.** Learning for Life knows the proper procedures to follow to ensure that the young victim will be protected from any possible further abuse.

Background Information on Abuse

By definition, child abuse is harm to a person under the age of 18 that occurs immediately or

through accumulated effects over a period of time. When the harm is caused by withholding life's necessities from a child, it is classified as neglect. The ability to provide such necessities as food, clothing, education, and medical care, but failing to do so, is the factor separating neglect from the effects of poverty.

Three additional kinds of child abuse are caused by commission of acts against a child—emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

Emotional abuse occurs when a youth is consistently told that he or she is no good and never will be. Denigrating name-calling is a form of emotional abuse. Because the physical signs of this form of abuse are subtle, it is difficult to substantiate emotional abuse.

Physical abuse is the bodily injury of the youth by the parent or caretaker. Indicators of physical abuse include unexplained, unusual, or repeated injuries.

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between children where there is an unusual distribution of power such as when one is significantly older or larger. Indicators of sexual abuse include pain in the genital area, sexually transmitted diseases, and difficulty in walking or sitting down. There also are some specific behaviors that are associated with sexual abuse such as preoccupation with sex; inappropriate sex play; sleep disturbances; wearing lots of clothing, especially to bed; and fear of being left alone with a particular person.

Child abuse is also a cause of stress, as are any number of other events in a child's life, such as family disruption and divorce, loss of a pet, and problems in school. This stress may cause reactions such as bed-wetting, crying for no apparent reason, immature or regressive behavior, clinging behavior, aggressive behavior, withdrawal, substance abuse, inability to concentrate, unexplained aches and pains, running away, and depression. If any of these persists over a prolonged period, there is reason to be concerned and the behavior needs to be looked into.

Child Abusers—Who Are They?

By far, most child abuse occurs within the victim's family. While abusers tend to defy any kind of orderly profile that would facilitate their easy identification, there are some general factors associated with various kinds of abuse. Child abusers tend to be individuals with low self-esteem. Their own needs are so overwhelming that they are poorly equipped to meet the needs of their children. Ignorance about children and children's needs is also a factor in some child abuse cases. Often children who are neglected have parents who abuse drugs or alcohol. An emotional abuser might have unreal expectations of the child and maligns the child when he or she fails to meet those expectations.

Physical abuse can occur when the pressures experienced by the caretaker or parent seem to be insurmountable and the child does something that "triggers" physical violence—the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Physical abuse can also happen when physical punishment becomes extreme or exaggerated. Often, physical abuse can be avoided when the individual realizes the need for time out and has someone to provide respite care of the children for a brief period.

Child Molesters

Individuals who sexually abuse children are known as child molesters. Just as with other kinds of abusers, child molesters do not fit any convenient profile. Most child molesters are ordinary-appearing people. It is not unusual for a child molester to occupy a position of respect in the community. Child molesters may be professionals, such as physicians, schoolteachers, members of the clergy, or public officials. It often is very difficult to accept the notion that such prominent individuals violate society's taboos and engage in sexual activity with children.

Date Rape

A form of sexual assault of particular concern for Explorer-age young women is "date rape," or acquaintance rape. More than half of the rape victims reporting to police are adolescent females, and their greatest risk for sexual assault appears to be through a social relationship with a boyfriend or date.

As in any form of forced sexual contact, date rape is a crime and the victim deserves emotional support and assistance. Such help is available through the rape crisis centers in nearly every community. If the alleged offense occurred during an Exploring event, the Learning for Life executive must be contacted immediately.

Youth Protection Policies of Learning for Life

An important component of Learning for Life's Youth Protection emphasis is adherence to the policies, which will ensure that young people participating in any phase of the Learning for Life program are safe from abuse.

Fraternization

Because the Explorer program is designed for young adults, there often is little difference in the ages of the post Advisors and the post participants. It has been found that maintaining a close social relationship, as in dating, between adult leaders and Explorers is disruptive to the post's program and, therefore, is not permitted by Learning for Life.

Creating External Barriers

After selecting the best possible leaders, further protection for children can be structured into the program. The following policies have been adopted to provide additional security for youths in the program. In addition, they serve to protect adult leaders from situations in which they are vulnerable to allegations of abuse.

- ▲ *Two-deep leadership.* Two Learning for Life adult leaders or one Learning for Life adult leader and a parent of a participant, both of whom must be 21 years of age or older, are required on all trips and outings. If the activity is coeducational, leaders of both sexes must be present. The participating organization is responsible for ensuring that sufficient leadership be provided for all activities.
- ▲ *No one-on-one contact.* One-on-one contact between adults and Explorers is not permitted, except for authorized ride-along programs. Personal conferences must be conducted in plain view of others.
- ▲ *Respect of privacy.* Adult leaders must respect the privacy of Explorers in situations such as changing into swimsuits or taking showers at camp, and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. They must also protect their own privacy in similar situations.
- ▲ *Separate accommodations.* When camping, no youth is permitted to sleep in the tent of an adult other than his or her own parent or guardian. We strongly encourage you to have separate shower and latrine facilities for females, and when separate facilities are not

available, separate shower schedules for males and females should be posted.

- ▲ *Proper preparation for high-adventure activities.* Activities with elements of risk should never be undertaken without proper preparation, equipment, supervision, and safety measures.
- ▲ *No secret organizations.* There are no “secret” organizations recognized by Learning for Life. All aspects of the Exploring program are open to observation by parents and leaders.
- ▲ *Appropriate attire.* Proper clothing for activities is required. Skinny-dipping is not appropriate as part of the Explorer program.
- ▲ *Constructive discipline.* Discipline in Exploring should be constructive and reflect the program’s underlying values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.
- ▲ *Hazing prohibited.* Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Exploring activity.
- ▲ *Junior leader training and supervision.* Adult leaders must monitor and guide the leadership techniques used by Explorer leaders.

Adherence to these policies not only enhances the protection of our participants, but also ensures that the basic values of Exploring are preserved. Learning for Life is prepared to help posts develop strategies for implementing these policies; for example, sharing leadership between units if two-deep leadership for campouts is a problem. All of these policies are designed to create barriers to abuse within the Explorer program.

Disclosure

Considering the prevalence of abuse and the educational programs that increase adolescents’ awareness of sexual molestation, you might someday have a participant of your post tell you that someone has molested him or her. If this happens, you must be prepared to help the Explorer. Follow the guidelines below if an Explorer indicates that he or she might have been the victim of abuse or exploitation.

Don’t panic or overreact to the information disclosed by the young person.

Don’t criticize the youth.

Do respect the youth’s privacy. Take him or her to a private place away from others, yet still in view. Reassure the victim that you are concerned about what happened and that you would like to help. You might want to ask if the youth has talked

with his or her parents about the abuse—if a parent was not the alleged abuser.

Do not promise to keep the victimization secret, as it will be necessary to make a report to the Learning for Life office. Learning for Life will advise you of your responsibility to report to child protective services or to a law enforcement agency.

Do encourage the Explorer to tell the appropriate authorities. You may do this by making sure the youth feels that he or she is not to blame for what happened. Tell the youth that no one should ask him or her to keep a special secret, that it is okay to talk about what happened with the appropriate adults, and that the youth will not be blamed.

Do keep it strictly confidential. Take your guidance from the Learning for Life office or the child protection authorities to whom you reported. Discussing allegations of abuse with others is not helpful to the child.

Reporting Requirements

Anytime you suspect child abuse in the Learning for Life program, you are required to inform the Learning for Life executive.

Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the United States territories have different reporting requirements. Many of these jurisdictions require child care professionals to report suspected child abuse, and in some states, reporting laws have been interpreted to require reporting by adults in volunteer child care positions. You should be aware of your reporting responsibilities. This information is available from your Learning for Life office.

No state requires the person making the report to have proof that abuse has occurred—only that it is suspected. The intent of most state laws is clear—they expect suspected child abuse to be reported as soon as it is suspected. Failure to do so can result in civil or criminal penalties.

Concern is often expressed over the potential for criminal or civil liability if a report of abuse is made that subsequently is found to be unsubstantiated. All states provide immunity from liability to those who report suspected child abuse. The only requirement that states make is that the report is made in “good faith.” Some states make the presumption that a reporter is making the report in good faith.

As a volunteer in the Explorer program, you are cautioned that you are not an investigator. The investigation of abuse allegations is best left to the trained investigator. Action on reports of suspected child abuse may be facilitated by

working through the Learning for Life executive, who has established a working relationship with the administrators of the child protective services program and law enforcement agencies.

Learning for Life will not tolerate any form of child abuse in its program and will take all necessary steps to remove any offenders from participation in Learning for Life.